DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 318 HE 033 073

AUTHOR	Blue, Dionne A.
TITLE	When "They" Are Also "Us": Building Community and Negotiating Culture among Students of Color in Higher Education.
PUB DATE	2000-04-00
NOTE	51p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Students; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; *Diversity (Student); *Educational Research; Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Minority Groups; Program Effectiveness; *Racial Identification; Student Attitudes; Summer Programs

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of the Opening Doors Summer Research Institute, an intensive summer research program designed to reverse negative retention trends among minority college students. The study examined experiences of minority students participating in a research program designed to introduce culturally diverse undergraduates to the world of graduate study, describing how students formed relationships across racial, ethnic, color, and gender lines while learning to conduct educational research. It also examined how the program helped students negotiate identity. Respondents were 20 former program participants from several cohorts (1992-98) who volunteered to participate. Individual and group interviews were conducted with respondents, and documents collected from students during the program (i.e., autobiographical information, weekly journals, program evaluations, and research papers) were examined. Interviews were also conducted with the program facilitator. Results indicated that the program offered participants many benefits. The program played a pivotal role in students' personal and scholarly development. Students learned to conduct educational research, to recognize their academic potential, and to build cross-cultural relationships. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 443 318

When 'they' are also 'us': Building community and negotiating culture among students of color in higher education.

Dionne A. Blue
The Ohio State University

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana; April 24-28.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. BLUE
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

DRAFT: Please do not cite without permission of the author.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

When 'they' are also 'us': Building community and negotiating culture among students of color in higher education.

The Opening Doors Summer Research Institute, or "Opening Doors: The World of Graduate Study for Minority Students in Education," is an intensive summer research program that works to reverse negative retention trends among students of color in higher education, and provides the focus for the research study. There were several purposes for this research study, the first of which was to examine the experiences of students of color participating in a College of Education six-week research program designed to introduce undergraduate students from culturally diverse backgrounds to the life and world of graduate study, including its academic, social, and political expectations. Specifically, the study described the ways in which a racially and culturally diverse group of students of color formed relationships across lines of race, ethnicity, culture, and gender within this context while learning to conduct educational research. Within that frame, I desired to understand the processes they underwent in learning about themselves and others as racialized beings and what meanings they attached to those experiences.

Furthermore, the study sought to understand the role of the program itself, including its design, curricula, and processes, in facilitating the aforementioned relationships. In other words, this study examined the ways in which a program such as Opening Doors could be instrumental in helping students of color to negotiate issues of identity and to form bonds across cultures in an educational and social environment where all participants and facilitators are members of traditionally marginalized cultures. In researching this program, I sought to uncover ways that educators might develop pedagogical strategies that do not focus merely on helping students of color 'overcome' racism, or on teaching White students to 'tolerate' people of color. Instead, within this study, I desired to understand how those pedagogical approaches might offer a deeper level of student engagement: one that allows people of color to gauge themselves against something other than Whiteness and/or

racism. Specific research questions used to guide the overall research study were as follows:

- How are racial/ethnic/cultural identities and differences re-constructed within culturally/racially diverse groups of students of color?
- How does developing/nurturing relationships help students of color come to define themselves as people of color, both within and against socially constructed dichotomies of self and other?
- What pedagogical strategies/conditions help or hinder maintenance of a positive racial/ethnic/cultural identity for students of color as they negotiate cultural and racial issues within various contexts?

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks used to guide the study were twofold. Firstly, given the need to work within and against paradigms based in Western ideologies, critical theories have provided a framework through which I could conceptualize this research project. Kincheloe & McLaren (1994) state that the project of critical research "is not simply the empirical re-presentation of the world but the transgressive task of posing the research itself as a set of ideological practices" (p. 144). This is especially true when working with people of color, since critical theories tend to critique the far-reaching negative effects of hegemony and power relationships in our society. At the same time, they maintain concern with how our experiences and lives are socially constructed and situated within changing sociopolitical contexts (Freire, 1994; hooks, 1994). Critical approaches to research involve critiquing both the process of research itself, and the position/standpoint of the researcher, in order to avoid reifying research as the road to 'absolute truth.' Additionally, because racism as an institution informs every aspect of our lives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Wing, 1997), critical paradigms also recognize that racism is a deeply embedded, institution and should be viewed as such, rather than as an individual deviation from an otherwise Democratic, just way of life. To view racism as a temporary cycle of events or as an anomaly is to misunderstand the myriad ways that race and the power associated

with race are historically rooted and deeply inscribed. Finally, critical theories identify the role of culture in constructing reality. In other words, although every culture has its own system of mores, values, and ways of constructing reality, it is the dominant culture that has changed and/or shaped the realities of other cultures. Because hegemonic, Western philosophies have "constructed the world we live in-named it, discussed it, explained it" (Scheurich & Young, 1996; p. 8), critical theories seek to recognize and legitimate the ways in which traditionally marginalized cultures construct their/our own social realities within the context of their/our own socio-political positions.

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the racial identity development of former participants of the Opening Doors program, various models of racial identity development were used to frame the study. The first, Cross' (1995) model of racial identity development, which refers specifically to the identity development of African Americans, consists of five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization and internalization-commitment. Cross (1995) maintains that for persons in the first stage, race has low salience; they are instead indoctrinated into the values of hegemonic Western culture. Race is a physical reality, but plays "an insignificant role in their everyday life" (p. 98). Tatum (1997) adds that in this stage, "the personal and social significance of one's racial group membership has not yet been realized, and racial identity is not yet under examination" (p. 55). In the second stage, encounter, a significant event or experience causes a re-evaluation of current attitudes on race, resulting in a process whereby those attitudes are challenged. The encounter need not be negative; rather, "it may, instead, revolve around exposure to powerful cultural-historical information about the Black experience previously unknown to the person" (p. 105). Stage three, immersion-emersion, involves deconstructing previous perspectives, "while simultaneously trying to construct what will become his or her new frame of reference" (p. 106). Individuals in this stage may adopt many of the codes and symbols that they perceive to be associated with their new racialized identity-although they do not fully realize

what this new identity will become. This stage is often marked with the "either/or" thinking that demonizes Whiteness and rejects anything that does not represent one's interpretations of racial "authenticity."

Stage four can be described as the point of "dissonance resolution" (Cross, 1995, p. 113), or a time when a balance is reached between one's feelings regarding White cultural groups, and one's feelings of self as a person of color. Cross (1995) further states that as one's "general defensiveness fades, simplistic thinking and simple solutions become transparently inadequate, and the full complexity and inherent texture of the Black condition mark the point of departure for serious analysis" (p. 114). The final stage of identity development, a stage Cross describes as essentially equivalent to stage four, is internalization-commitment, and is characterized by sustained interest and commitment to a "personal sense of Blackness" (p.121). Researchers of color have identified characteristics critical to the development of a racial or ethnic identity for Asian, Hispanic, and Native American communities in the United States as well (Casas & Pytluk, 1995; Sorlowsky, Kwan, & Panns, 1995). There are many similarities between those models and the Cross (1995) model, with the basic characteristics being a move from possessing an unexamined sense of self ethnically, into an ethnic identity search, eventually developing a more 'achieved' sense of ethnic identity.

It should be noted that no identity category or stage is linear or completely independent of another. Any member of any group can be in any stage at any point in life. Likewise, movement between stages is not fixed. In fact, "given the ever-changing cross-racial/ethnic interactions that individuals can experience in their lifetime, it is quite possible for an individual to stay at one specific stage, move forward, or even move backward" (Casas and Pytluk, 1995, p. 166). Tatum (1997) takes this notion a step further by stating that not all people (speaking of Blacks in particular) move through every stage. Finally, it should be noted that identity "achievement" or "actualization," as outlined in the literature as the final step, is indeed, not static. The process of ethnic identity

development according to Phinney (1990) does "not necessarily end with ethnic identity achievement but may [and does] continue in cycles that involve further exploration or rethinking of the role or meaning of one's ethnicity" (p. 503). It would be problematic to assume that ethnic identity development ends in a destination, rather than being an ongoing process of self-reflection and awareness.

Research Methodology

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) characterize qualitative research as a field "defined primarily by a series of essential tensions and contradictions" and that it is our job as researchers to "first locate ourselves in these tensions and contradictions" (p. ix, x). Critical approaches provide theoretical alternatives that hinge upon positioning oneself in the research among those tensions and contradictions, and challenges hierarchical power relationships between researcher and researched. Likewise, within critical traditions, methodological approaches are as ideologically bound to the ethics and values of the researcher as are the theoretical frames used to conduct the research. Qualitative methods such as those used in this study provide a way to capture these notions in ways that are diverse and creative, and that are spiritually, culturally and personally relevant for me as a researcher.

Lather's (1994) exploration of critical research designs provides a framework for conceptualizing methodology as tied to a struggle against domination, and was useful to my own conceptualization of methodology as it related to this research project. Firstly, critical research designs *"explore more interactive, dialogic, and reciprocal research methods that work toward transformative action"* (p. 107). Conducting research involves building relationships: with the researched, other researchers, and others associated with the research study and the research process. Building rapport within those relationships is vital in moving the researcher agenda forward, especially considering that power and privilege is both fluid and mutable depending on the context (Fine, Weis, and Powell, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum, 1997). The second characteristic of critical research designs is that they *"connect meaning to broader structures of social power, control, and history"*

(p. 107). A critical part of conducting research is de-compartmentalizing lived experiences and positioning those experiences within the larger societal context, including the racism, sexism, classism, and other 'isms' that plague this society. Because neither knowledge nor lived experience exists inside of a vacuum, failing to locate meaning within the 'big picture' perpetuates the oppressive nature of hegemonic culture.

Thirdly, Lather (1994) asserts that research designs based within a critical frame *"work toward open, flexible theory building grounded in both confrontation with and respect for the experiences of people in their daily lives"* (p. 107). Researchers who enter the research situation with predetermined notions of what they should find will probably find them; however, entering the research context prepared to work with the researched subjects to find meaning challenges traditional ideas of molding data to fit theory. Finally, critical research designs *"foreground the tensions involved in speaking with rather than to/for marginalized groups."* The assumption of privilege and power, whether that is along lines of race, class, gender or education, can easily produce an anti-dialogic relationship between the researcher and the researched, such that the researcher easily falls into the snare of conducting research *on* or *for* groups rather than with them. I attempted instead to view the research context, as "mutually educative," avoiding missionary tendencies to see myself as *savior* (Lather, 1994; p. 107).

Methods of Data Collection

Respondents in the study included twenty (20) former participants of the Opening Doors Summer Research Institute, and were purposefully selected from within each of the seven cohorts of the program, which existed from 1992 to 1998. Each research participant was a person of color, and represented a variety of ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Of the twenty respondents, fourteen (14) were females and six (6) were males. In addition, sixteen (16) were Black/African American, three (3) were Asian American, and one (1) was Latina. Each former program participant whose contact information was on file was contacted via mail and/or telephone and invited to take part in the study. From those who

volunteered to participate, actual respondents were selected based on the desire to obtain as much of a gender and ethnic/cultural mixture as possible in the final research sample.

Individual interviews were conducted with fourteen students across cohorts of the program, while one group interview was conducted with six members of the final cohort of the program. Initial interviews were design to assess students' schooling experiences as well as their experiences in the program, particularly as those experiences related to negotiating racialized identities, to developing a sense of community within the group, and to influencing career choices. Aside from formal interviews, an examination was conducted of the written data collected from each respondent during their tenure in the Opening Doors program. These data included: demographic information in the form of biographical information sheets; autobiographical information obtained from videotaped autobiography presentations; weekly journals; program evaluations distributed at the end of each summer session; and final research papers.

Secondly, the design and curriculum of the program, including all formal and informal activities and events were among the data examined. In addition, the primary facilitator of the program was interviewed individually to gain an idea of the history and philosophy of the program, as well as her perceptions of various cohorts of the Opening Doors program as a collective. Finally, all documents related to the structure of the program, including mission statements, year-end reports, course syllabi, and class handouts were collected and analyzed in order to assess the ways in which a program such as Opening Doors could be instrumental in helping students develop cultural understandings that could be transferred to the classroom and other contexts.

Finally, keeping a research journal and taking field notes are forms of narrative that researchers may use as methods of collecting and analyzing data, as well as a way of engaging in self-reflection, and was therefore a critical aspect of the methodology used in this study. Dillard (1996) suggests reflective writing as a way to stay engaged in the process of literacy development and of connecting the

'word to the world' in the Freirian sense. She suggests that these connections cannot be maintained if teachers "continue to sit outside the influence of [their] pedagogical practice," or if they "are not situated in the process of [their] teaching as learners as well" (p. 20), an idea that can be easily situated in a research context. For researchers, that process includes understanding and recognizing what our politics are, critiquing the ways in which we view the world, interrogating our philosophies and beliefs about both teaching and education, and thoroughly examining our attitudes towards students, their experiences, and the multiple roles they play in society.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis can be described as an ongoing process that starts from the moment the first piece of data is collected in the study (Huberman and Miles, 1994). Viewing the analysis process in this way keeps the research 'alive,' since the researcher is in constant interaction with the data. A research journal cataloguing the field experience was used as an ongoing aid, particularly in initial data reduction and analysis. To facilitate data analysis and to honor my desire to remain immersed in the data, I personally transcribed each interview verbatim from audiotapes. Formal data analysis strategies included coding the data both manually and using QSR*Nudist, a computer software program designed to aid in the coding and analysis process (Richards & Richards, 1994), and all of the interpretations and analyses in the study emerged directly from the codes used to categorize and organize the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Among the initial coding categories were student understanding of racial identity, both their own and others, and the role of the Opening Doors Program in encouraging those understandings. Other coding categories included community/relationship building, particularly across cultures, and the benefits of the curriculum and instruction of the Opening Doors program. These categories were refined during the analysis process as other patterns emerged. Themes were categorized around three primary areas: 1. Student understanding of self in a racialized context before participating in the Opening Doors program; 2. Shifts

in racial & cultural understandings and relationships as a result of Opening Doors participation; and 3. New understandings of self as racialized beings in relationship with & to other people of color.

The Research Setting

Approximately one hundred forty (140) students have participated in the Opening Doors program over the past seven years, and are selected from around the country based on various criteria, including academic excellence and economic need. Each participant must be from a historically marginalized ethnic background, i.e., of African, Asian, Hispanic or Native American descent. Selected participants must also be current undergraduate students or college graduates with no post-Baccalaureate educational experience, and be interested in pursuing careers in the field of education. Students spend the summer living in graduate student housing and receive a scholarship award, which serves as a summer salary. Room and board, including meals and a stipend for travel expenses is also provided for each student.

The Opening Doors program originated at a large Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Pacific Northwest United States in 1992, and moved to an even larger PWI in a major city in the Midwest United States, where it was housed after 1994. The program was developed in part, to fulfill the university's desire to increase representation among historically underrepresented groups in graduate programs, specifically programs in education, with the eventual goal being to advance them into professional positions at the K-12 and university levels. In addition, the program was designed to provide these undergraduate students an opportunity to conduct and produce research comparable to that expected of students at the graduate school level in a structured, yet nurturing and supportive environment. In terms of structured activities, participating students begin the summer session by selecting a research topic of interest to them related to education. Under the guidance of both their faculty mentors and the program's facilitator and staff, each student submits a research proposal, including a detailed review of the literature. Subsequently, each student

conducts a full research study within the six weeks of the program, while attending a program-related research methods course taught by its facilitator, while writing reflective journals each week. The program culminates in a final research colloquium during which time each student presents the results of his/her research study.

The Opening Doors Program: Discussion and Interpretation

Theme I: Student understanding of self in a racialized context before participating in the Opening Doors program

One of the primary findings in the study revolved around student understanding of themselves in a racialized context before participating in the Opening Doors. Awareness of the realities of race came in various ways for the students involved in the study. Regardless of individual ethnicity, class background, or gender, each participant had an encounter with someone of a different racial background, in most cases someone White, who brought the realities of race and the meaning of difference home to them. While there were students in the study who were taught either explicitly or implicitly about the salience of race, or in some cases taught not to trust members of other backgrounds, there were others who were more naive in their understandings of themselves as racialized beings, and to the meanings that were attached to those understandings. For example, because Raquel[5], an African American woman, has lived in diverse environments, she has also had a variety of interactions with a wide range of people throughout her life. While such a background may have kept her from some of the more blatant racial incidents described by other respondents in this study, she has nevertheless had quite a few experiences with the implicit forms of racism that many face each day just by nature of their ethnic background. These experiences are what some may call 'sins of omission' rather than 'sins of commission.' Raquel describes an incident from high school that was critical in helping her understand both the complexities and subtleties of race for people of color:

---

[5] All names and identifying information have been changed.

*Much to my surprise, I was nominated for the homecoming court. I had never even dreamed that that would happen to me, and ended up winning homecoming queen. I was totally shocked and surprised-and happy! I was cool enough to be voted for homecoming queen. But then the dance rolls around and nobody will take me. There was one brother there who I was like 'come on [.***, let's go. Since I'm homecoming queen, we get in for free; our pictures are free. I'm gonna borrow this dress from my friend, you just put something on. I got a coupon for dinner, we can have a $10 dollar dinner.' And the deal sounded good enough to him that we were able to go. My dad literally was even trying to figure out who could take me to the dance. Now I'm cool enough to be voted homecoming queen, but you cannot take me to the dance. It was the whole: 'folks didn't know what to say to their parents about going out with a Black person.' They were intimidated. That just kind of shows that it's okay to associate with Black people to an extent, but when you get to a certain point there's a line you can't cross (Individual Interview Transcript).*

Raquel's experience may not be unlike other African Americans, particularly African American females, who may have felt accepted among their White peers until the awkward stage of puberty, when the decisions adolescents make around dating become more clearly racialized (Twine, 1996). Her reaction to winning as prestigious a title as prom queen, yet being unable to get any of those peers to accompany her to the dance, was one of anger and hurt, yet it allowed her to see, as she stated later, that there was a line that she could not cross with them. For many of the respondents described in the study, and possibly many more students of color in similar situations, living in White communities meant that there were invisible boundaries that made them acceptable in some contexts but not all. Recognizing these unspoken parameters can be disconcerting for students of color, and may have adverse effects on their self-concepts and on the development of a positive racial identity.

For those students whose ethnic or racial identity fell outside of the polarities of Black and White, racial identity had a totally different meaning. Skylar, a woman of Filipino and Japanese background, had experiences with race that threw a wrench into the usual Black-White constructions. As an Asian American woman, she had a hard time placing herself into pre-constructed racial categories, and therefore didn't always readily identify with those classifications. She grew up in White middle class communities, and considered herself 'just like them.' Because she identified herself with White culture throughout adolescence, Skylar saw minorities as 'other than' herself. As illustrated by the following data excerpt, she hated seeing herself as someone who was different, which may have produced unresolved feelings of self-hate or self-rejection, feelings that are experienced by other people of color for many of the same reasons. Skylar describes her identity development with the following statement:

> *For the most part I felt like I was part of the White majority (in spite of my genetics) and that I had little or nothing in common with other racial minorities except having to deal with prejudice. White American culture is made the norm in this country by the media. Since I grew up among them, I had little or no other cultural images, which really skewed my sense of what was acceptable or valuable. It made me want to disown my racial identity at times to become part of the mainstream. It was difficult for me to see the value in racial and cultural differences, especially those that manifested themselves in me. When I was younger, being the different one all the time made me want to downplay race. All I knew was that I wanted to fit in and have friends so any difference that threatened that was to be downplayed. Whenever people asked me where I was from I soon learned that what they really wanted to know was my ethnicity. Sometimes I wouldn't even tell them my ethnicity when asked the question. I would say 'I'm American like you.' To which they would usually reply, "No, you know what I mean. Where are you from?" I became annoyed with the*

assumption that just because I wasn't White or Black that I had to be a foreigner (final evaluation).

As an adolescent, Skylar didn't see being Asian American as a source of pride, but as an external force placed upon her that made her vulnerable to the prejudices of others. For some students involved in the study, neutral or negative racial encounters caused a fissure from their racial selves. For others, having negative interactions causes them to cling more vehemently to their racial identity. As demonstrated by Skylar's statement, the experiences that many respondents described in regard to race often led them to construct their identities in a way that was juxtaposed to Whiteness. When left to construct their racial understandings according to notions of difference, that identity may become oppositional because Whiteness is often the primary barometer or means students of color have by which to compare themselves (Maher & Tetreault, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). For respondents in the study, having to construct their identities in an oppositional way usually meant that they felt inferior to their White peers and classmates. Given this, it seems necessary

to help students develop a positive sense of racial or ethnic self that does not come as a result of 'not' being something else, but instead one that allows them to see themselves and their culture as equally valuable to the White culture they may have been taught to value over their own. A program like Opening Doors can be instrumental in that process, as demonstrated throughout this study by providing ethnically diverse groups where students of color can able to experience cultural representation beyond Whiteness.

Theme II: Shifts in racial and cultural understandings and relationships as a result of Opening Doors participation

One of the primary concerns/expectations with which students entered the program had to do with the ways in which they perceived graduate school. Before coming into the program, many if not all of the respondents in the study, understood graduate school to be something out of their reach either financially or academically. Many had only minimal exposure to the process of conducting research, while others had none at all. Fortunately, even given the fears that came along with a lack of exposure, each student accepted

the challenges involved in being an Opening Doors research intern, and many progressed to the rigors of actual graduate study and succeeded. One prominent factor in students' decision to participate in Opening Doors had to do with the need to prove themselves as scholars, an idea that is also tied to perceptions of graduate school. In other words, the idea of needing to and/or being able to prove themselves as scholars involved wondering if they could accept the challenge of graduate school. They wondered if it would be too difficult; that is to say that despite having received acceptable, even outstanding grades as undergraduates, they were insecure and afraid that they were not academically prepared, and on a base level, that they were not smart enough to "make it" in graduate school. Without a model of what graduate school could be like, students like those described here, may see it as something that only 'other people' do, or in the case of students of color, as an accomplishment that only White students have the ability and finances to achieve. Attending Opening Doors changed these misconceptions of graduate school. Likewise, receiving the needed validation through the

program, while perhaps not necessarily increasing the level of scholarship of each participant, made students like Raquel more confident in the scholarship she was already able to produce:

> *The day I gave my presentation, I remember how I felt such a sense of accomplishment. I felt like I had done this bomb piece of work, and I felt that Dr. D was so proud of me, and that just meant so much to me. She had always assured me, 'don't be nervous. You're talking about your work. Nobody knows your work better than you do.' I just remember her saying that. I just felt like, you know, this is alright. I can do this. This shouldn't intimidate me. And really that lesson has carried over in other things in life too, not just my graduate school experience. It just made grad school not so scary (Individual Interview Transcript).*

Raquel indicates that having someone who she respected in the field be proud of her helped her see that she was not being applauded because she was a student of color, or because someone was letting her 'get by.' Instead, she knew that it was because she could do

good work. Raquel expressed the notion of seeing graduate school as something that was not only within her reach, but something that was not as mystical or horrifying as she thought before her summer in Opening Doors. Raquel reiterated the fears that many students upon entering the program, as well as the overwhelming sense of accomplishment they felt at the end of the program. The feeling of having completed a major research project provided a springboard into graduate study that students needed to feel prepared for graduate school.

Aside from graduate school preparation, students in the study valued the relationships they were able to build within and across various contexts, and the only way they could begin to build these cross-cultural relationships with one another was to begin by empathizing with one another's experiences. Noddings (1984) states "caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the others'" (p. 24). As was demonstrated in this study, students could not begin to see one another as *both* different from *and* similar to themselves until they stepped out of the personal space they inhabited up to that point. The structure of the program allowed them multiple opportunities to be involved in one another's lives, making it easier for them to break down barriers they had constructed in relation to perceived 'others.' For example, Omar an African American male, grew up in both predominantly Black and White environments. For him, the Opening Doors experience provided exposure to cultural groups outside of his previous experience. At the same time, as illustrated in the following excerpt, Omar was able to develop a stronger sense of his racial self within the context of other people of color sharing the struggles of their lives and the histories of their cultures:

> *I think what [the Opening Doors experience] did is help me gain a better appreciation for my race-and other people's races. It helped me gain an appreciation because my research was on Black children, and you can't research Black children without researching the Black community and understanding the history of being Black. So it helped me develop a stronger identity of who I am, from a historical,*

and also a philosophical level. I also gained a pretty good understanding, because we had people from all over and listening to them, and spending time with them. We were able to actually live and experience some of the same things that they were experiencing. We had the opportunity to do these creative autobiographies, which was enlightening as to how some of these people grew up, and some of the stresses of their lives. So I think that gave me a better appreciation for other cultures, and people from various backgrounds (Individual Interview Transcript)

By opening spaces for dialogue among students of various ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, etc., students were precluded from reifying negative images of themselves or others. Building community among the students was critical to helping them shift their perceptions of themselves and one another. The facilitator/director set a tone in which each participant in the learning process took risks, and made a commitment not to judge another's ideas; instead, students helped one another to conduct what hooks (1993) calls a "critical interrogation" of their beliefs and ideas (p. 92). The classroom context could then become a site of transformation for students of all backgrounds, where all participants take responsibility for adding constructive discussion, rather than a place where racist beliefs are asserted or essentialist claims are made. Discussing cultural issues in an academic environment that was respectful of all opinions provided students with experience in having hard conversations and confronting feelings that they may not always understand, which may also help them to build bridges across cultures. Because the Opening Doors setting allowed the interaction of ideas, students were able to share their feelings and experiences regarding racial issues, helping to increase knowledge and understanding for all. Although participants were in varying stages of their identity development, having a place that was open to dialogue allowed conversations to take place across contexts that are not always accessible to them. In this particular program, because both staff members and each participant has traditionally been a person of color, there were natural occasions to discuss the social

context of education in relation to the research interests of the students, which usually revolved around issues within the ethnic communities of which they are a part.

The final aspect of this theme had to do with the pedagogy involved in the program. For the respondents in the study, part of perceiving the Opening Doors learning environment as beneficial had to do with seeing their facilitator as a human being rather than as the all-powerful authority figure, which is how they had been accustomed to viewing their teachers and instructors. Seeing her as an explicit contradiction to that seemed to promote their engagement in the learning process. As a pedagogical philosophy, this attitude helped to break down the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student whereby teachers are unapproachable experts in the classroom. As future teachers, they felt it was important to see their facilitator as a human being while understanding that she still had a certain amount of power by nature of being their instructor. In the following excerpt, Michaela reveals why she feels it was important to see Dr. D, the program's director/facilitator in this manner:

I can say that Dr. D seems like she's concerned with us, the total student in the classroom. When you're talk about getting personal with the journals and that kind of stuff, she strikes me as the type of person that goes beyond the classroom. She brings in all of those experiences she has. That's how we know as much as we do about her, because she brought all that stuff in and let us in on that. So it seems like she's concerned with the total you (Group Interview Transcript).

Michaela equates Dr. D's willingness to reveal herself to them as a sign of her concern for them as whole individuals rather than as academic containers detached from human needs and emotions. By sharing pieces of her life through autobiography, journals and conversations, Dr. D demonstrated a level of trust in the students that they were able to mirror back to her and to each other. This act of care also enabled her to build a relationship with them, which as illustrated through interviews, final evaluations and informal conversations, was an important component of Opening Doors.

Educators like Dr. D, who are concerned with race and cultural diversity issues, gender issues, and/or class constructions, have taken up the idea of practicing teaching as an act of freedom in developing curricula and pedagogy that allow traditionally oppressed or marginalized groups to be empowered in their own education processes (Freire, 1994). This Freirian notion of education challenges traditional 'sit and get' educational philosophies in which the student mind is a passive, non-critical container into which selected knowledge is served. Instead, such pedagogical strategies are openly value-based, rejecting the idea of neutrality in education (Freire, 1994; hooks, 1994). These conceptions of education, which also explode the teacher-student duality, make students critical, active participants in the process of their education and removes the teacher as the only authority in the classroom.

Theme III: New Understandings of Self as Racialized Beings in Relationship with and to Other People of Color

For the students involved in this research study, the summer spent in the Opening Doors program had many life changing effects. While each respondent described the ways in which the program aided in their professional or personal growth, the impact of the cultural dynamics provided as large a lesson. Aiding students in their cultural identity development was not an explicit goal of the program, yet because each group consisted specifically of students of color living in close quarters and conducting research on issues that were often times related to race or culture, they had little choice but to confront the issue of cultural identity. In some cases, the summer's experience changed their perceptions of their own racial/ethnic positioning, while in other cases it changed their perceptions of other cultural groups. In many cases, it changed both. Malcolm, an African American male, demonstrates that for some students, moments of insight came more in regards to other cultural groups, in terms of learning both about other groups and about themselves specifically in relation to those groups. Malcolm felt that he was able to learn what people other than Blacks and Whites have to say about race and culture, which for him added a necessary perspective to an old conversation. Hearing the views of people

unlike himself extended his own thinking, allowing Malcolm to challenge himself:

> *I would say Opening Doors gave me an opportunity to see how other people of color think about issues of culture. In our group, we had Latinos. We had Native Americans. We had a whole range. To see how other people talked about their own cultural identity, and use research to examine that, in terms of trying to educate people or trying reach people. So, I thought that was very powerful about Opening Doors (Individual Interview Transcript).*

For Skylar, Opening Doors provided the opportunity to form bonds across cultures that she previously had no occasion to form. At the same time, she was able to see how multifaceted each individual's identity truly is, and how these layers intersect with similar identity layers of those outside of a given cultural group. The following data excerpt illustrates the personal growth she experienced as a result of being in this context. Specifically, she comments on the tendency to create monolithic images of other cultural groups:

> *[The program] changed my perception that people of the same racial group all possess the same racial identity that instantly binds them together. It also showed me how a shared goal or experience can bond people together in a way that transcends differences in racial identity (Individual Interview Transcript).*

Being in a group consisting exclusively of people of color allowed students to examine many issues related to their own cultural history and knowledge. At the same time, they were able to make necessary connections with those that they ordinarily may not have taken the chance to befriend. For each person who took a risk to move outside of the comfort zone of their own culture, they were able to learn things about themselves and each other beyond what they would have ever thought possible. Omar says of the relationships formed in his cohort:

> *I still feed off of the relationships that I developed with Opening Doors. I know it's been going on for 6 or 7 years now, but each year is different. But that 93 group, you*

know, there's always a connection with that group of people- some more than others-that you always have. It's an experience that only you and those 22 other people or whatever, went through, and can't nobody ever alter or change that. So I mean it's real special, it's real special. You look back at pictures and things like that, and you look back at when you started your career in higher ed., or moving to an advanced degree, and you start there. That was the defining moment. And we kicked it! (Individual Interview Transcript)

One of the most relevant factors that emerged around building cross-cultural relationships was that of reciprocity: that is, giving one's whole self and expecting parallel effort from others in order to build relationships that are not unilateral or competitive, but that help to create environments of cooperation and care. Among the students involved in the study, those who felt that they made a whole-hearted effort to get to know one another and to reveal themselves to one another beyond superficial or exterior characteristics gained the most long-lasting overall benefits from the program experience. Lindsay, a Japanese American woman, expressed these sentiments:

I think we lucked out, and I know several of us have talked about it, but I felt we had a really good group. I found them very accepting, for the most part. I think there was a great acceptance of where everybody was, personally and academically. And really there's just a lot of love, I think, between all of us. These people changed so much for me, like how I felt about my abilities and in terms of what I had to be. So I think it was one of the few places where I've been able in my whole life to let down my guard and be me. That was a great thing. I don't know what happened-I don't know what luck happened-but I really, really loved the group of people we had (Individual Interview Transcript)

This idea of reciprocity was important in helping students form lasting relationships with one another. In situations where students felt that they were receiving the same amount of energy and care that they extended, the bonds were more intimate. The act of letting

one's 'guard down' as expressed by Lindsay, produced a certain amount of vulnerability, but at the same time, students felt that the context of this program was a safe space in which to do that. Feeling that their peers were willing to extend themselves to one another, be that for personal or academic purposes, produced a level of trust among Opening Doors participants that allowed them to create meaningful relationships within and across cultures.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The research data indicate that an ethnicity-based program such as *Opening Doors* may aid students of color in visualizing themselves as graduate students, scholars, and professionals situated within particular socio-historical contexts by:

- Providing an environment for intellectual development, knowledge construction and self reflection that is open, dialogic, and culturally relevant;
- Supporting them in a critical examination of the multi-layered aspects of identity;
- Enabling them to make meaningful connections between their own lived experiences and those of other students of color, both in and out of formal classroom contexts;
- Assisting them in developing meaningful relationships within and across cultures;
- Helping to disrupt their stereotyped conceptions of "others" and allow them to begin to develop their racial/ethnic identity in alliance with other people of color;
- Facilitating students of color in developing a greater understanding of themselves as racialized individuals within a larger collective of people of color; and by
- Providing a model of the ways that future educators may improve their understandings of the role of race and pedagogy in facilitating their own students' understanding of themselves and others.

Conclusion

The Opening Doors program held a host of benefits for each of the students who participated in the study. While many of them

described what they expected, the fact remained that they had no idea what the program would in fact do for them either in the short or long term. Naturally, the outcomes of the study can only be applied to the individuals and contexts described here. Yet for the subjects who chose to participate in the study, the Opening Doors program played a pivotal role in both their personal and scholarly development. They learned to conduct educational research and were able to recognize their academic potential as a result. While it is possible that students may have learned the basics of research in other contexts, Opening Doors was unique in its demographic constitution. The program and its facilitators established a standard and expectation for a high level of scholarship as well as an open environment for all of the heated debates, personal narratives, and lives as works in progress that accompanied it. With the mentoring and pedagogical influences of program facilitators and other faculty, students were able to use this experience as a springboard into other successful scholarship or professional ventures. The structure and pedagogy of this program provides a model of the ways in which educators can foster relationship building among students across cultures that develops both their critical thinking skills, cultural knowledge, understandings of self.

References

Casas, J.M., & Pytluk, S.D. (1995). Hispanic identity development. In Ponterotto, J.G., Casas, J.M., Suzuki, & L.A., Alexander, C.M. (Eds.). *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 155-180). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cross, W.E. (1995). The psychology of Nigrescence. In Ponterotto, J.G., Casas, J.M., Suzuki, & L.A., Alexander, C.M. (Eds.). *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 93-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dillard, C.B. (1996). Engaging pedagogy: Writing and reflecting in multicultural teacher education. In *Teaching Education, 8*(1), 13-21.

Fine, M., Weis, L., & Powell, L. (1997). Communities of difference: A critical look at desegregated spaces created for and by youth. In *Harvard Educational Review, 67(2)*, 247-284.

Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: New revised 20th anniversary edition*. New York: Continuum.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1993). Transformative pedagogy and multiculturalism. In T. Perry & J. Fraser (Eds.), *Freedom's plow: Teaching in the multicultural classroom* (pp. 91-97). New York: Routledge.

Huberman, A.M. & Miles, M.B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-444). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kincheloe, J. L. & McLaren P. L. (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 138-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W.F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. In *Teachers College record, 97*(1), 47-68.

Lather, P. (1994). Critical inquiry in qualitative research: Feminist and post structural perspectives-science "after truth." In B. Crabtree, etc. al. (Eds.), *Exploring collaborative research in primary care* (103-114). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. In *Interchange, 17*(4), 63-84.

Maher & Tetreault (1997). Learning in the dark: How assumptions of Whiteness shape classroom knowledge. In *Harvard Educational Review, 67*(2), 321-349.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics & moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Phinney, J.S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. In *Psychology bulletin, 108*(3), 499-514.

Richards, T.J. & Richards L. (1994). Using computers in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 445-462). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Scheurich, J.J., & Young, M.D. (1996). Coloring epistemologies. Are our research epistemologies racially biased? In *Educational Researcher, 26*(4), 4-16.

Sleeter, C. (1993). How White teachers construct race. In McCarthy C., & Crichlow, W. (Eds.), *Race, identity & representation in education* (pp. 157-171). New York: Routledge.

Sodowsky, G.R., Kwan, K.K., & Pannu, R. (1995). Ethnic identity of Asians in the United States. In Ponterotto, J.G., Casas, J.M., Suzuki, & L.A., Alexander, C.M. (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 123-151). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tatum, B.D. (1997). *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.

Twine, F. W. (1996). Brown-skinned white girls: class, culture and the construction of white identity in suburban communities. In *Gender, place and culture*, 3(2), 205-224.

Wing, A. (Ed.) (1997). *Critical race feminism: A reader*. New York: New York University Press.